

# DPW UPDATE

April 2003

## COC Tightens Security As War Begins

Radio reports the morning of March 20 were all about bombing in Baghdad. At the County Operations Center (COC) the seriousness of world events came home when employees on their way to work found parking lot gates locked and a long line of cars waiting for security checks at the Overland Avenue entrance.

Traffic at the gate was delayed because many employees did not have their security badges with them and had to sign in.

In a memo from C. Ronald Hicks and Deborah Steffen, directors respectively of the Department of General Services and the Office of Emergency Preparedness, employees are reminded to always carry their County ID badge. At press time, the Homeland Security threat level is at "Orange," the second highest level. Should it be raised to "Red," COC will be fully secured and physical signs of increased security such as concrete barriers will be in place.



## Mitigating Losses for Department Gains

by Jessica Eslinger

With millions of drivers using more than 1,800 miles of roads and infrastructure in unincorporated San Diego County, traffic accidents are inevitable. Controlling what drivers do on roadways is nearly impossible, but protecting County reputation and taxpayer dollars makes Loss Mitigation is important.



*Ed Phillips points out accident evidence from a crushed vehicle,*

When a serious accident occurs on a County roadway, Sheriff dispatchers at Station M notify Ed Phillips, Loss Mitigation's accident reconstruction specialist. He's on call around the clock, seven days a week and is one of the first on the scene, carefully preserving evidence, photographing the accident site and documenting all perishable artifacts. He saves the collected information, in the event a claim for damages resulting from a serious or fatal accident is filed against the County.

If this happens, County Counsel notifies Loss Mitigation to jump-start the casebuilding process. Dan Silvestre, Loss Mitigation supervisor, uses Phillip's information to construct a game plan. He, along with Steve Ingalls, County Counsel paralegal Joanne Millot, Marie-Grace Mendoza and Julia Smith, perform an in-depth review of all relevant documentation. They talk to surveyors, land development staff and other roads experts to understand why the accident occurred and whether it could have been prevented.

If the claim progresses into a lawsuit they break down the scene into key photos and develop maps to pinpoint the location of the accident in relation to neighboring communities. They identify any inaccuracies in the plaintiff's case. Possible witnesses and experts for depositions and court appearances are identified and run through courtroom scenarios.

"We do everything we can to put us in the best possible position to defend against the lawsuit," said Tom Parry, unit manager of Safety and Loss Mitigation.

Loss Mitigation has a dual role: they act as information liaisons between DPW and County Counsel, but they also work as key case builders and clients. According to Silvestre, this “balancing act in the brain,” keeps them on guard at all times; they must uphold customer service values, including the release of information to constituents, but they have to be careful not to disclose confidential attorney-client communications to courtroom adversaries. They simplify complex issues so the average person can understand the involved accident and roadway dynamics, and make educated decisions about accident liability.



The team averages 70 serious injury accident investigations and processes 97 claims each year. Their detail-driven work is reflected through their success rate - 88 percent of all cases won.

“County employees are excellent workers and we want to make sure that’s well communicated,” said Parry. “Our greatest mission is to show San Diegans that the County really cares for them and the quality and safety of our County roads.”

*(l-r) Tom Parry, Steve Ingalls, Julia Smith, Dan Silvestre, Ed Phillips, and Marie-Grace Mendoza.*

## What’s the Good Idea?

### The DPW eTrader

“One Section’s Trash is another Section’s Treasure.” That’s the motto of the new eTrader, a “Good Idea” from Administrative Support. Yes, they know the County has a salvage program, and different sections can get items from salvage. But what about serviceable items that could be reused within the department? To help save a buck or two in these times of budget cuts, the eTrader puts an e-mail notice out to designated supply clerks and managers containing items that other sections may want. This proactive approach is designed to save money by preventing unnecessary purchases. Besides saving money, reuse saves energy and ultimately landfill space. The longer an item is used, the longer it’s out of the landfill. That’s good for the environment.

“We tried to make it fun and feel like eBay,” said Zem Lee, Intermediate Clerk Typist in Administrative Support. “We tested it with several users and made it as easy as possible to submit items. Think of it as an ongoing swap meet without any cost!”

Zem and the rest of the Administrative Support team hope the eTrader helps the department save money. They ask that sections submitting items to trade look up and enter the value so they can track how much money it would have cost to buy the items if they weren’t offered free. The submission form is available in Word Templates. The notice will be sent every two to weeks to begin with, but frequency may change depending on response. For now, it’s just a Good Idea and its time has come.

## Employee Satisfaction: And the Survey Says...

Each year, the County conducts an employee satisfaction survey. Surveys are distributed to all employees, containing a number of questions to gauge employee satisfaction. Survey information is sent to a central location committed to confidentiality. The Department of Human Resources separates all comments from survey results and deletes any references that could indicate where a comment came from. The December 2002 survey had the largest number of responses since 1999, with 241 of you providing completed surveys.

In the December 2002 survey, DPW employees expressed the highest level of overall satisfaction since surveys began in 1998. Highlights include a 15% jump in job satisfaction between 1998 and 2002, and a 5% jump over 2001 results for the question “Is morale in your work group satisfactory?”

Other results (compared with 2001):

- A 9% increase in satisfaction with available technology

- A 10% increase in satisfaction with office facilities
- A 4% increase in feeling top management is accessible to all employees
- A 4% increase in feeling your supervisor encourages cooperation with other groups

We have some work to do, too. Several employees expressed a desire for more technical training, especially in the area of budget and requisitions. Management Services is gearing up to answer this need by providing short “brown bag” training sessions on various topics, and will continue to streamline and simplify processes to make it easier to tackle procurements and other “paperwork” procedures. Another request was having more information available up front for new employees. In response, Personnel is reviewing and revising new employee packets.

## *Safety and Wellness*

### **Posture Perfect**

Almost all of us sit at a computer and type at least some of the time, whether at work or at home. Injuries from repetitive motion and poor posture can be severely disabling. The good news is that these injuries are among the most preventable!

**Posture:** Lengthen spine into its natural balanced position, keeping head held over the shoulders and in line with the buttocks.

**Chair:** Tilt seat according to comfort or medical requirement.

**Desk height:** Middle row of the keyboard should be level with the elbow, (forearms parallel to the floor). If the desk is too low, raise with desk feet, if too high use a foot stand and raise seat height. Place mouse in an easy reach zone, by keyboard.

**Screen:** Should be at arms length and on eye level in front of the user (visual angle 0-21°). Position at 90° to any light source avoiding glare or reflections. Use copy-holder so input data is within field of view.

**Telephone:** If used for more than 40% of the working day, consider a headset to free hands for more efficiency.

**Space:** Create sufficient room to work, especially if multitasking. Place equipment on stands or arms if necessary.

**Movement:** Prevent static loading. Rock, change position to reduce fatigue. Place one foot in front of the other, alternate position during the day. Take breaks and vary tasks.

### **BREATHING BREAK**

- Stand straight with feet together. Put your hands behind your back and interlock the fingers, palms upward. Now turn the palms down. This will automatically give a twisting movement to your elbows.
- Inhale deeply, then bend forward, while exhaling, at the same time raising the arms until they are stretched out. Elbows should remain straight throughout. Keep your head down, trying all the while to swing your arms a bit higher and higher.
- Remain a moment in this position, holding your breath; then slowly return to the standing position without unlocking your fingers. Repeat the entire sequence two or three times.

## *Training*

### **SWOT ANALYSIS – What is it? How can I use it?**

#### **A Tool for Analyzing Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**

*by Kirsten Aaboe Hope, Training Coordinator*

SWOT Analysis is a very effective way of identifying the strengths and weaknesses, and of examining the opportunities and threats you face when you consider a project or endeavor: building a garage, buying a boat, deciding on where to invest, deciding which bill to pay first, even when to get married or have children. Carrying out an analysis using the SWOT framework will help you to focus

your activities on areas where you are strong, where the greatest opportunities lie. It allows you to address your areas of weakness or threat with greater understanding. It's one of the key steps in any strategic planning process. Unless you know what the situation actually is, you don't have a clear picture of how to move forward intelligently.

To carry out a SWOT analysis, write down answers to the following questions.

**Strengths:**

- What are my advantages?
- What do I do well?
- What do other people see as my strengths?

Consider this from your own point of view and from the point of view of the people you deal with. Don't be modest - be realistic. If you are having any difficulty with this, try writing down a list of your characteristics. Some of these will hopefully be strengths!

**Weaknesses:**

- What could I improve?
- What do I do badly?
- What should I avoid?

Again, consider this from an internal and external basis - do other people seem to perceive weaknesses that you do not see? Are your competitors doing any better than you? It is best to be realistic now, and face any unpleasant truths as soon as possible.

**Opportunities:**

- Where are the good possibilities I'm facing?
- What are the interesting trends I am aware of?

Useful opportunities can come from such things as: changes in your economic or personal relationships; changes in government policy related to your field; changes in social patterns, population profiles, lifestyle changes, etc.; or local events that are coming up.

**Threats:**

- What obstacles do I face?
- What is my competition doing?
- Are the required specifications for my job, products or services changing?
- Is changing technology an issue I need to consider?
- Do I have cash-flow problems?

Carrying out this analysis will often be illuminating - both in terms of pointing out what needs to be done, and in putting problems into perspective. We then know what we can support and enhance, and what we need to pay attention to and take care of. SWOT is an analytical tool that works anywhere from the boardroom to the living room.

## **DIVISION NEWS:**

### **Land Development**

#### **Monitoring Meets Engineering**

Stormwater, flood control and watershed issues demand a lot of attention from DPW and Department of Environmental Health (DEH) employees. But even though employees of both departments have the same focus, they were working at different locations until last month. LUEG General Manager Bob Copper decided to merge the two entities into one unified task force. Now, DPW has 22 new employees and a much more resourceful County Watershed Protection Program.



Cid Tesoro, Stormwater Program Manager, will oversee DPW's Compliance and Enforcement, and Flood Control employees. The Program Assessment and Development team, Science and Monitoring staff and Community Services Group will report to Jon VanRyhn, Water Quality Control Manager.





VanRhyn, a 13 year County employee from DEH, is excited about the change.

“It makes perfect sense,” he said. “The immediate benefit is that we’re combining groups that *should* be talking to each other.”

“In the long run, this move will make our jobs much more efficient because they’ll be a single point of accountability,” he said.

“DPW is such a strong unit,” said Tesoro, “and by bringing in the DEH folks, we’ll be able to assess field and water quality issues much more quickly.”

*VanRhyn*

*Tesoro*

## Management Services

### B-I-N-G-O’s the Game, Diversity’s the Name

Do you know the significance of Cinco de Mayo? How about what happened at Kent State or what Rosa Parks did to challenge racial inequality during the 1960s?

These questions are just a few answered during March’s Management Services staff meeting. Employees from the Director’s Office, Recycling, Administrative Support, Financial Services and



Personnel played a round of Diversity Bingo, a game exploring familial, cultural and historical differences among employees. Each participant was given a Bingo card containing 25 diversity-based questions and their goal was to answer every question with a different coworker’s name.

“This was a terrific way to learn about the people in our section,” said Leticia Arellanes, administrative secretary to the Director’s Office. “I think acknowledging our differences brought us closer together and made our team even stronger.”

Ethics and Diversity training sessions will be completed by all DPW sections by the end of the fiscal

year.

*From left: Recycling’s Wayne Williams poses with Alicia Zlotnick and Lisa Lonsdale from Special Districts while playing Diversity Bingo.*